

Find Out What's Next For You: The Lifestage Performance Review

By Maddy Dychtwald
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Every year, I conduct a lifestage performance review on myself. We've all endured performance reviews at work, right? And most of us hate them because far too often so-called *performance* reviews are really reviews of how we didn't measure up and where we need to improve. I'm not a masochist, so why would I want to put myself through that – or even look forward to it?

Because the way I go about it isn't a list of faults; it's a path to possibilities. I go over what I was happy with in the past year and what I was disappointed by. I don't try to hit all points of the compass – that's a shortcut to insanity. I zoom in on whatever seems is taking priority: One year it might be my career path, another it might be my overall physical fitness, another year it might be any of my most significant relationships.

For instance, last year I decided I'd really like to spend more time with my 81-year-old mom. She doesn't live near me nor near any of the primary places I visit for work, so it required some careful advance planning. I scheduled several visits right at the beginning of the New Year, added them to my calendar and held those dates sacred. I even bought the plane tickets in advance...non-refundable to make sure I stuck to the plan. The result was several short but intimate visits throughout the year that we both really cherished.

Here's the important thing: My lifestage performance review has a section called *what happens next*. I map out a route outlining the steps I'll need to take, the skills I'll need to learn and the strengths I'll need to develop to get to where I want to go. Because I know too well that life doesn't follow a straight line, I'll allow for detours and scenic routes. And then to make it tangible, I'll set deadlines. (I'm allowed to grant myself occasional extensions.) If necessary, I'll calculate a budget.

And you know what? This process has actually changed my reality and could change yours, too. Short-term, it helps you renew and refresh yourself. Long-term, it helps you reinvent yourself. I can attest to that because I'm a living, breathing example of it. When I first met and fell in love with my husband Ken, I was an actress living in Los Angeles and Ken was writing a book and building a business in Berkeley. Trying to juggle my career and my romance between two cities was just impossible – I'd be late to auditions, late to meet Ken. Everyone was mad at me, including Ken. I recognized that something had to give. I didn't want lose the love of my life, so I reinvented myself.

I had no idea what I wanted to transform into, so I sat down and made a list of the things I really liked to do and things I felt strongly about. Much as I liked acting, a disturbing element was that

so many women actors were considered irrelevant by the time they hit 30 and over the hill at 35. It didn't seem to make sense, and I wanted to explore why.

Coincidentally, the fact that Ken was in the field of aging was one of the things that drew us together; our mutual interests gave us a lot to talk about. At the time, the field was mostly focused on caring for aging adults and trying to make life better for them. I was more interested in how to extend the good years, so that you're not just aging but aging well. I had a great sounding board in Ken. At the same time, he was writing his best-selling book, *Age Wave*, and as he tested ideas on me, I'd make suggestions about how to sharpen the points and improve his presentations. Then he said, "Hey, maybe we could partner."

That was 28 years ago, and since then, I've reinvented myself many times: as a speaker, as an author, as a wife, mother and daughter.

Over the course of time, I've come to realize that reinvention isn't just a titillating exercise of tweaking. It's an absolute necessity.

The pattern of our lives was once defined by our age: birth, education, work, marriage, family, retirement, and death occurred in a linear pattern, compressed by our relatively short lifespan. But our life expectancy has stretched an extra 30 years over the past 100 years, opening a world of possibilities: going back to school at 35, starting a new family at 45, crafting a new career at 55, getting remarried at 70. The *circle of life* has replaced the straight-and-narrow path.

Maddy Dychtwald is an author, lecturer and co-founder, with her husband Ken Dychtwald, of Age Wave, a leading organization that studies Baby Boomers and the impact on society of this demographic. A Boomer herself, the author of "[INFLUENCE: How Women's Soaring Economic Power Will Transform Our World for the Better](#)" and "[Cycles: How We Will Live, Work And Buy.](#)" This article can be found at <http://www.thirdage.com/whats-next/the-lifestage-performance-review>.